

**Remarks of U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall
Ranking Democrat - Committee on Resources
Park Professionals Protection Act
June 26, 2003**

As the Fourth of July holiday approaches, families will pack up and head out to America's majestic National Parks, only to encounter crumbling bridges and poor historic preservation due to a maintenance backlog, magnified by a lack of funding.

Indeed, once considered America's "crown jewels," our national parks have become besieged with financial problems.

Campgrounds are closed, buildings are in disrepair, roads are potholed and natural resources are degraded. Visitation is at near-record levels, yet the park service has reported backlogs for construction improvements and maintenance in excess of \$6 billion.

Surely, something is foul in the financial management of our parks.

Today, I am pleased to team up with Nevada Senator Harry Reid in an effort to address one aspect of this situation, and that is the type of experience the 421 million annual visitors to our National Park System can expect this year and in the future under the Bush Regime.

The fact of the matter is that then candidate George Bush, on September 13, 2000, posed before the Cascade Mountains in Washington State to vow that if elected he would eliminate the massive maintenance backlog in the park system. This was before he discovered aircraft carriers, mind you.

Today, it is also a fact that the Bush Administration has provided only 15cents for every dollar that is said was necessary to address these maintenance problems.

Instead, the Administration is squandering scarce federal dollars in a misguided attempt to slash 70% of the jobs of National Park Service employees, replacing them with private-sector subcontractors.

Rather than investing to protect our park resources, and enhance the visitor experience, over \$5 million is being spent on private consultants to study what is known as 'outsourcing' these jobs.

Yet, not a single study to date has demonstrated even a nickel in savings would be earned as a result of outsourcing.

And from the perspective of the average American family, when they drive up to Yellowstone, or Yosemite, or even the New River Gorge in my home State, instead of being greeted by the friendly park ranger, it will be rent-a-cop asking them for the admission fee.

The Administration's privatization scheme is so vast, so unwarranted and so clumsy that it threatens to undermine both the National Park Service and the resources it was created to protect.

To avoid this, today Senator Reid and I are introducing the "Park Professionals Protection Act."

This legislation will permanently protect the integrity of National Park Service jobs and the high standards to which the American people expect their parks to be maintained by prohibiting privatization. Positions in science, maintenance, and emergency fire and rescue should not be marginalized in the name of politics.

The bill also reallocates the millions of dollars that are wasted on studying outsourcing to the operation and maintenance of National Parks. Without this funding, repairs to bridges, maintenance of camp sites, and preservation of historical sites will suffer - all things that candidate Bush vowed to protect.

The team of Reid-Rahall is here today to remind the Bush Administration that the mission of the National Park Service is resource protection and visitor enjoyment, not profit.

To accomplish that mission, the National Park Service needs employees motivated by a love of people and of parks, not of money. The natural, cultural and historic resources contained within our National Parks are too valuable to allow the job of protecting them to be traded on the open market.

We are also here to say that we want to help now President Bush to be able to fulfill his campaign promise by supporting this legislation and signing it into law.

Thank you.